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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000460

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM PHUM NI

SUBJECT: BUGAJE: A BAD ELECTION BETTER THAN A DELAYED ELECTION

ABUJA 00000460 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell Hanks for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Both external pressure from the international community and domestic activism are needed to ensure that the Nigerian Government sticks to its constitutionally mandated electoral calendar. Failure to adhere to the current calendar would plunge the country into a crisis of legitimacy and be the precursor to political chaos, according to Usman Bugaje (AC-Katsina), Chairman of the Nigerian National Assembly(NASS) House Foreign Affairs Committee and key advisor to Vice President Atiku Abubakar. Bugaje, a leading northern intellectual and gubernatorial candidate for Katsina state, believes that the likely confusion and contestation resulting from disorganized and, at least, partially rigged elections in April would be a better alternative than the probable chaos resulting from postponed elections.

¶2. (C) During a lengthy discussion in his office on March 5, (one day prior to the collapse of Umaru Yar'adua) Bugaje shared with Poloff his perspective on the politics of his home state, Katsina, his chances in the gubernatorial race, and the challenges facing the PDP. Bugaje, who was elected to the House on the PDP ticket, switched parties late last year and is seeking to replace the current governor Umaru Yar'Adua, who is running for president. Katsina, the home state of two presidential candidates (Buhari and Yar'adua) Bugaje intimated, offers important insights into Nigerian political trends.

#### THE GUBERNATORIAL RACE IN KATSINA STATE

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¶3. (C) Bugaje said that the general mood in Katsina State was anti-PDP and that established PDP members were making private overtures to his campaign. He estimated that support for his PDP rival in the campaign was at about 25%. The competition for governor is deeply affected by zonal politics, Bugaje said, with one candidate, for political reasons, changing his zone of origin. This move is seen by many in Katsina as political opportunism, and upsetting a delicate balancing act which revolves around the acceptance of the informal zonal rotation for elected offices.

¶4. (C) The gubernatorial contest was further complicated by

the popularity of presidential candidate Buhari, who is also a native of the state. Despite Buhari's undeniable appeal, Bugaje said, his party the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) was in disarray. As a result many voters were not likely to vote a straight party ticket. Many people, Bugaje said, have approached him privately to tell him that they would vote for him as governor (AC), but would support Buhari for president (ANPP).

**¶15.** (C) Bugaje said that this has led candidates from an array of smaller parties to reach a formal alliance behind his AC candidacy. This coalition includes, he claimed, failed PDP gubernatorial candidate and NASS Speaker of the House, Aminu Masari. The unifying element holding this disparate coalition together, Bugaje intimated was "the politics of dissatisfaction."

**¶16.** (C) Despite the favorable political climate, Bugaje said he foresaw a problem with voting and tabulation. His efforts to secure the ward by ward voting lists have been unsuccessful. He did get a summary sheet listing the total number of registered voters in each ward.

**¶17.** (C) In an attempt to avert rigging, Bugaje has set up "youth committees," primarily composed of educated members of the community whose mandate is to protect the vote in local polling places. Bugaje said that the groups had already introduced themselves to local INEC officials and would monitor the process up to and including the tabulation of results. Bugaje said he hoped this would counteract "the normal way of rigging" at the polling places, which he listed as police stealing the ballot box, stuffing the ballot boxes and brazenly changing the vote tallies at the polling sites.

#### ELECTIONS A MUST

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**¶18.** (C) Bugaje believes that the entire election, especially

ABUJA 00000460 002.2 OF 002

in the North, is centered on a deep dissatisfaction with the ruling party, a desire for a power shift to the North, and the determination of people to pick their own leaders. Because of this, Bugaje said, there was little willingness to tolerate a delay of the election for any reason. The widely shared view in the North, he said, was that the President wanted to extend his stay in office by delaying elections. "The surest way to put this country in crisis is to postpone elections."

**¶19.** (C) Bugaje said that an interim arrangement would also portend crisis, as there are no constitutional mechanisms for such an arrangement. This lack of legitimacy, he said, would "be an invitation for the military to intervene." Impeachment, Bugaje said is "not possible," because of lack of time and the lack of political cohesion which would be needed to push the measure through the fractious National Assembly. Bugaje noted that section 143 of the constitution stipulates a strict time line and complicated process which would take at least three months, involve several votes, an investigation by a panel chosen by the Chief Justice which would investigate the allegations and issue a recommendation.

If and only if the panel's recommendation was positive, the National Assembly would then need to pass the final impeachment resolution by a two thirds majority.

**¶10.** (C) If impeachment proceedings were to take place it would not happen in parallel to election preparation but supplant it because of the political significance, Bugaje predicted. Defeat of the impeachment motion, he argued, would provide a de facto extension. The time for resolution would stretch well past the April date for elections. As a practical matter, Bugaje said, most members are worried about their own political futures, and in fact, no longer spend the majority of their time at the National Assembly. Impeachment would require their presence in Abuja and would thus stop local campaigning.

BUT WORRIED ABOUT A DELAY

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¶11. (C) Bugaje expressed concern about the technical preparations for elections. Of particular concern was the printing of the ballots, which he believes is beyond the capacity of the Nigerian Mint, who recently received the printing contract. INEC needs to print 240 million ballots which it says will include photos of presidential and gubernatorial candidates. With a little more than a month to go, Bugaje pointed out there is no clarity on who the final candidates will be, thus making sticking to an already tight deadline, even more difficult. Bugaje said the international community should get involved in printing the ballots. This would raise public confidence that the job will be completed on time and done right.

¶12. (C) Given the political and logistical problems surrounding elections and election preparation, Bugaje says some of the concerns are legitimate, although he asserts some may be contrived to intentionally delay elections. Nonetheless, Bugaje said, any delay in the conduct of elections would be "a recipe for disaster." "At the end of the day," he asserted, "a bad election may be the least worst option."

CAMPBELL